

Message Text

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S E C R E T ROME 14333

EXDIS

FOR COUNSELOR SONNENFELT AND ASSISTANT SECRETARY HARTMAN FROM
AMBASSADOR VOLPE

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, PINT, IT, US

SUBJECT: ALMIRANTE VISIT

REF: (A) ROME 14088, (B) STATE 234643, (C) ROME 14233

1. NEW DEVELOPMENTS IN REACTIONS TO ALMIRANTE AFFAIR REQUIRE
ME TO EXPRESS RENEWED CONCERN AND AGAIN TO REQUEST ACTION TO
COUNTER GROWING NEGATIVE FACTORS.

2. FUELED BY ALMIRANTE PRESS CONFERENCE OCTOBER 2 WHICH
BANNERED "AMERICAN CONNECTION" ESTABLISHED BY MSI DELEGATION,
DAILY AND PERIODICAL PRESS COVERAGE OF MSI LEADERS' VISIT
CONTINUES HEAVY. EDITORIAL COMMENTS ARE UNIFORMLY CRITICAL.
TERMING MSI EXPLOITATION OF WASHINGTON RECEPTION "GROTESQUE",
CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATIC PARTY PAPER WARNS THAT VISIT "DOES NOT HELP
THE FIGHT DEMOCRATIC PARTIES ARE WAGING" TO DEFEND ITALIAN
DEMOCRACY. THE NORMALLY FRIENDLY CENTER AND CENTER RIGHT PRESS
IS EMBARRASSED FOR US. REPUBLICAN PARTY (PRI) ORGAN MAKES SAME
POINT IN CRITICAL EDITORIAL CITING DAMAGE DONE TO VISIT TO "TRUE
FRIENDS OF LIBERAL AND DEMOCRATIC AMERICA". PRI PAPER FINDS
IT "PECULIAR" THAT PEOPLE IN RESPONSIBLE POLITICAL POSITIONS IN
U.S. CAN MAKE "SUCH SERIOUS ERRORS OF PERSPECTIVE". LEFT OF
CENTER PRESS SHARPLY CRITICAL OF VISIT AND INCLUDES STATEMENTS

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BY ALMIRANTE AND (CORMER AMBASSADOR) CAVALETTI CITING EXTREME

WARMTH WITH WHICH THEY ALLEGEDLY MET AND ALLEGED EXPRESSION OF SUPPORT RECEIVED AT "WHITE HOUSE" FOR THEIR CONTACTS WITH US PARLIAMENTARIANS IN INTERESTS OF WINNING LATTERS' SUPPORT FOR U.S. ANTI-COMMUNIST POLICY IN ITALY. FAR LEFT PRESS CONTINUES VITRIOLIC AND EMPHASIZES DIFFERENT TREATMENT ACCORDED COMMUNISTS AND NEO-FASCIST MSI AND POSSIBILITY THAT USG CONTEMPLATING USE OF MSI IN FUTURE "INTERFERENCE" IN ITALIAN AFFAIRS. (MORE DETAILED PRESS ACCOUNTS REPORTED SEPTEL.) THE CLEAR IMPRESSION GIVEN BY THESE REPORTS AND FROM MSI STATEMENTS SINCE THEIR RETURN IS THAT THE USG OPENLY ACCEPTS MSI AS A POSITIVE FORCE IN THE STRUGGLE AGAINST COMMUNISM IN ITALY.

3. THERE IS NO NEED REPEATING OUR ANALYSIS OF THE MSI AND HOW THEY ARE ANATHEMA TO MORE THAN 90 PERCENT OF THE ITALIAN ELECTORATE. OUR FRIENDS IN ITALY HAVE RECORDED THEIR DISAPPOINTMENT AND SHOCK OVER OUR "TRAGIC MISTAKE". FOR EXAMPLE, DCM WAS CALLED TO QUIRINALE AND ASKED FOR AN "UNOFFICIAL" EXPLANATION OF HOW THIS HAS HAPPENED. SPOKESMEN FOR THE DEMOCRATIC PARTIES, INCLUDING THE DC (SEE SEPTEL), SOCIALISTS, REPUBLICANS AND SOCIAL DEMOCRATS HAVE EXPRESSED THEIR DISTRESS AT OUR ACTIONS. A SENIOR AIR FORCE GENERAL CALLED AIR ATTACHE TO HIS OFFICE TO EXPRESS HIS "ANGER" OVER THIS APPARENT POLICY CHANGE BY USG. THE PRESIDENT OF THE AMERICAN CHAMBER OF COMMERCE HAS EXPRESSED HIS UNHAPPINESS TO US. IN NEARLY ALL CASES, THESE CONTACTS ARE SUGGESTING AND HOPING THAT WE CLARIFY OUR POSITION IMMEDIATELY ON THIS ISSUE.

4. WHAT MUST BE UNDERSTOOD IS THAT IN ITALIAN MINDS, U.S. IDENTIFICATION WITH THE MSI IS TANTAMOUNT TO OUR BEING ASSOCIATED WITH A NEO-NAZI PARTY IN GERMANY. THAT IS THE REALITY AND THE IDENTIFICATION OF THE MSI PARTY IN ITALY. IT IS ALSO TRUE THAT STRONG ITALIAN (AND EUROPEAN) REACTION TO RECENT EVENTS IN SPAIN HAS TENDED TO EXACERBATE ITALIAN REACTION TO ALMIRANTE VISIT TO U.S.

5. MY URGENT CONCERN IS THAT OUR INABILITY TO PUBLICLY STATE FROM WASHINGTON AND HERE THAT THIS CASUAL AND UNOFFICIAL MEETING WITH NSC STAFF MEMBERS IS NOT AN ENDORSEMENT OF THE MSI OR THEIR POLICIES, SEVERELY UNDERCUTS OUR EFFECTIVENESS IN ASSISTING AND RALLYING THE TRADITIONAL DEMOCRATIC FORCES IN THEIR EFFORTS IN SECRET

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RESISTANCE TO THE PCI. WE ARE DOING OURSELVES DAMAGE HERE AND WE MUST CAREFULLY CONSIDER THE PRICE OF OUR CONTINUED SILENCE, PARTICULARLY IN LIGHT OF IMPORTANT NATIONAL ELECTIONS WITHIN NEXT EIGHTEEN MONTHS. IN MY JUDGMENT, OUR FAILURE TO CLARIFY THE ISSUE AND PUT DISTANCE BETWEEN THE USG AND THE MSI COULD CALL INTO QUESTION OUR COMMITMENT TO DEMOCRACY IN ITALY. QUITE FRANKLY, THE PRESS GUIDANCE IN REFTEL B IS NOT ADEQUATE TO MEET THE MOUNTING CONCERN OVER THIS ISSUE.

6. I FEEL IT IS NOT TOO LATE TO TAKE DAMAGE LIMITING ACTION. UNDER THE CIRCUMSTANCES, THE MOST EFFECTIVE ACTION MUST BE TAKEN IN WASHINGTON. ALMIRANTE HAS PUBLICLY STATED THAT THE EMBASSY PLAYED NO ROLE IN THEIR VISIT AND THAT ALMIRANTE HAS NEVER MET ME. FURTHERMORE, HE AND HIS ASSOCIATES HAVE STRESSED THEIR WARM ACCEPTANCE AS STRONG ANTI-COMMUNISTS IN WASHINGTON WITH NO APPARENT CONCERN WHETHER THEY ARE FASCISTS. ("NOT ONE OFFICIAL ASKED US IF WE WERE FASCIST.") THEREFORE, I RECOMMEND THAT THE FOLLOWING PROPOSED STATEMENT BE RELEASED FROM WASHINGTON AND ALSO SENT TO US FOR RELEASE HERE.

7. QUOTE WE FIND IT VERY UNFORTUNATE THAT AN UNOFFICIAL MEETING BETWEEN TWO MEMBERS OF THE NSC STAFF AND MSI PARTY SECRETARY ALMIRANTE, IN RESPONSE TO A SPECIFIC REQUEST BY A MEMBER OF THE U.S. CONGRESS, HAS BEEN INTERPRETED AS US ENDORSEMENT OF THE MSI PARTY AND ITS POLICIES. THIS IS ABSOLUTELY NOT THE CASE. AS AMBASSADOR VOLPE RECENTLY SAID IN A PUBLIC STATEMENT, WHICH IS FULLY SUPPORTED BY THE PRESIDENT AND THE SECRETARY, WE WILL GIVE NO ENCOURAGEMENT TO EXTREMISM OF THE LEFT OR THE RIGHT. WE FAVOR A PROGRESSIVE DEMOCRATIC SYSTEM FOR OURSELVES AND FRIENDS AND ALLIES. CONSEQUENTLY, NO ENDORSEMENT, OR SUPPORT FOR, OR IDENTIFICATION WITH, THE MSI CAN PROPERLY BE IMPLIED FROM SUCH A MEETING. END QUOTE

8. I RECOGNIZE THAT THE DEPARTMENT AND THE WHITE HOUSE CONSIDERED CAREFULLY PRESS GUIDANCE IN REFTEL B. I TOO HOPED THIS WOULD HAVE PROVEN SUFFICIENT AND THAT THE MATTER COULD HAVE BEEN PUT TO REST WITHOUT SERIOUS DAMAGE TO IMPORTANT US INTERESTS. UNFORTUNATELY, THAT HAS NOT PROVED TO BE THE CASE. ACCORDINGLY, I AM COVINCED THAT A PUBLIC STATEMENT IN WASHINGTON LIKE THE ONE ABOVE IS ESSENTIAL TO MAKE VIABLE OUR POLICY OF OPPOSITION TO THE PCI. VOLPE

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